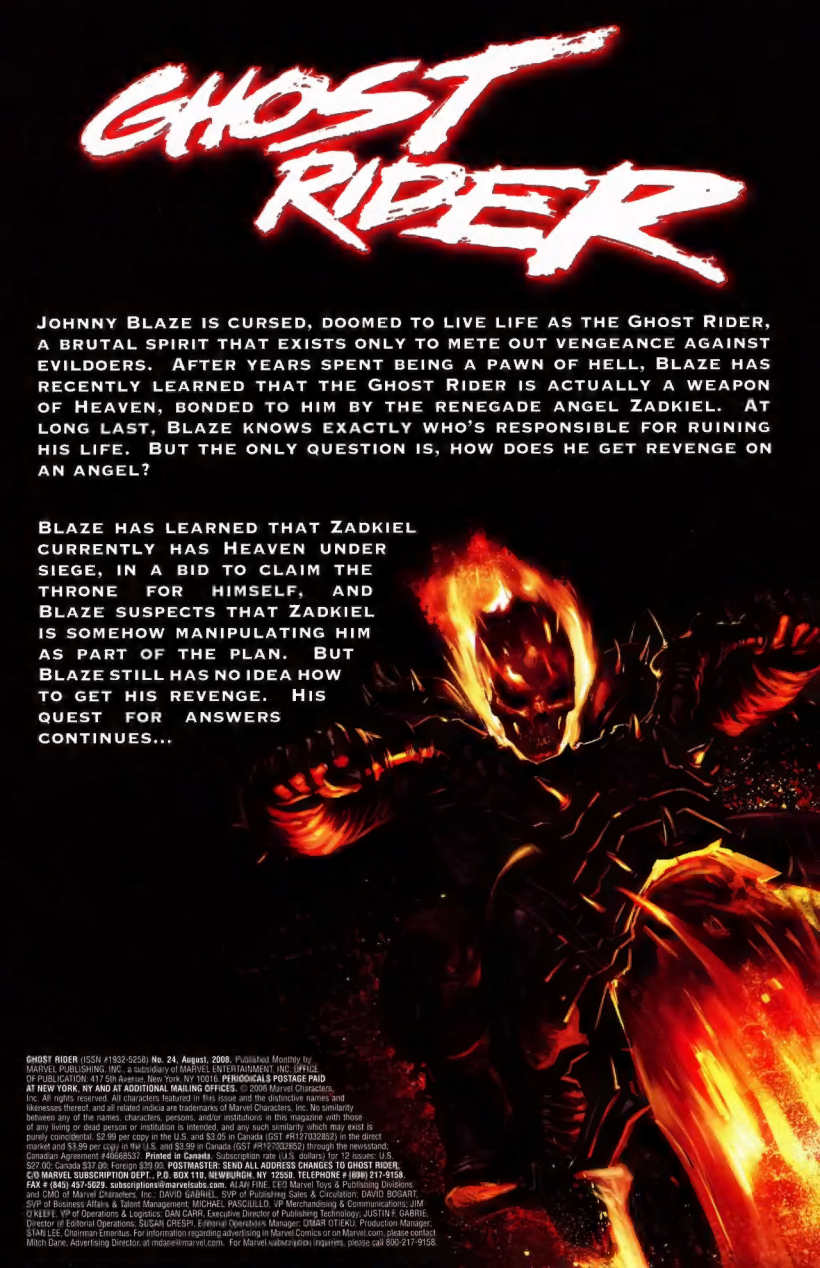
GHOST RIDER

Johnny Blaze is cursed, doomed to live life as the Ghost Rider, a brutal spirit that exists only to mete out vengeance against evildoers. After years spent being a pawn of Hell, Blaze has recently learned that the Ghost Rider is actually a weapon of Heaven, bonded to him by the renegade angel Zadkiel. At long last, Blaze knows exactly who's responsible for ruining his life. But the only question is, how does he get revenge on an angel?

Blaze has learned that Zadkiel currently has Heaven under siege, in a bid to claim the throne for himself, and Blaze suspects that Zadkiel is somehow manipulating him as part of the plan. But Blaze still has no idea how to get his revenge. His quest for answers continues...



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TWO YEARS AGO...
The First Church of the New Dawn
DISPATCH, WE ARE AT THE SCENE, INVESTIGATING REPORT OF SHOTS FIRED, OVER.
POLICE! NOBODY MOVE! NOBODY...
OH MY GOD...

IS IT... IS IT *OVER* NOW?
POLICE! HANDS IN THE AIR!
MOVE AWAY FROM THE GUN! HANDS ABOVE YOUR HEAD! *DO IT NOW!*
NO, WAIT... YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND... IT WASN'T MY FAULT...

THE ANGELS MADE ME DO IT.

THE PRESENT.
WELCOME TO SOLITARY CONFINEMENT, MOSS. DON'T EXPECT TO SEE THE SUN AGAIN NO TIME SOON.
HAXAMACHIE
MAXIMUM SECURITY PRISON
LEAST NOT 'TIL YA RECKON YOU CAN MAKE IT THROUGH CHOW WITHOUT BITIN' OFF NOBODY'S BODILY EXTREMITIES.
HEY, OFFICERS! I GOT A QUESTION!
THIS MY FIRST TIME IN SOLITARY AND ALL, SO I AIN'T EXACTLY SURE HOW THESE THINGS WORK...
BUT AIN'T I SUPPOSED TO BE THE ONLY ONE IN HERE?

WHAT THE...WHO THE HELL IS *THAT?*
GIVE ME A MINUTE *ALONE* WITH HIM, BOYS. I'LL FIND OUT WHO HE IS.
YOU...
I SMELL YOUR *SINS.*
YOU TALKIN' TO *ME,* BOY?
YOU'RE A MURDERER AND RAPIST.
TO SAY THE LEAST. I'M ALSO THE MEANEST, TOUGHEST HOMBRE IN THE WHOLE EAST TEXAS PRISON SYSTEM. YOU WANNA TAKE A RUN AT THE TITLE?
STAND DOWN, MOSS!
DON'T GET YOUR PANTIES IN A WAD, FELLAS. I GOT THIS.
WHATTAYA SAY THERE, SWEETHEART...
YOU WANNA *DANCE* OR WHAT?
SURE.

WHA...
UURR... WAIT... DON'T...
OH GOD, HE'S BURNING HIM.
NO...
THIS FIRE AIN'T MEANT TO SCALD THE FLESH...
AAAAGGGGHHHH!
IT CHARS THE SOUL.

WHUMP
GOOD LORD...WHAT THE HELL DID YOU DO TO HIM?
NOTHING, COMPARED TO WHAT I COULD'VE DONE.
RIGHT NOW, IT'S TAKING EVERY BIT OF WILLPOWER I GOT JUST TO HOLD THE REINS ON THIS...THING INSIDE ME.
THIS THING THAT WOULD LIKE NOTHING BETTER THAN TO TEAR THROUGH YOUR PRISON, BLASTING EVERY BASTARD IN HERE STRAIGHT TO HELL.
YOU TELL YOUR WARDEN, I DON'T WANT TROUBLE. JUST WANNA TALK IS ALL.
IF HE WON'T DO THAT, WELL...
THEN I MAY JUST HAVE TO LET GO OF THEM REINS.

LOCKER ROOM
HEY, BOB, HURRY IT UP. SOMETHING'S GOING DOWN IN SOLITARY.
YES...YES, I HEAR YOU...
BLOOD OF ANGELS
Angel's
YOUR SERVANT HEARS AND OBEYS, MY LORD.
THY WILL BE DONE.

ALL RIGHT, I'M HERE. SO *WHO* ARE YOU?
YOU THE *WARDEN?*
YES, DAMMIT. NOW WHAT DO YOU WANT? WHO THE HELL ARE YOU?
NAME'S JOHNNY BLAZE.
JOHNNY BLAZE? LIKE THE *STUNT CYCLIST?* I HEARD HE WAS DEAD.
HE IS.
YOU'RE *CRAZY*, PAL. WHY THE HELL AM I EVEN *LISTENING* TO YOU?
I DON'T KNOW, "PAL"...
WHY DON'T YOU ASK *HIM.*

I'LL HAVE YOU KNOW I DON'T RESPOND WELL TO IDLE THREATS.
WELL, THAT'S JUST *FINE*...
'CAUSE I DON'T MAKE THEM.
YOU READ THE *BIBLE* MUCH, WARDEN?
CAN'T SAY AS I DO.
YOU SHOULD GIVE IT A TRY. I'VE JUST STARTED GETTING INTO IT MYSELF.
YOU KNOW HOW MANY PEOPLE *GOD* KILLS IN THE BIBLE?
I MEAN, IF YOU ADD UP ALL THE FLOODS AND PLAGUES AND FIRE N' BRIMSTONE. ALL THE *"GOD SMOTE"* THIS, *"GOD SMOTE"* THAT... YOU KNOW HOW MANY PEOPLE HE KILLS?
MILLIONS.
AND WHAT ABOUT THE *DEVIL?* THE BIG, SCARY DEVIL. WHAT DO YOU THINK HIS BODY COUNT COMES TO?
A PALTRY *TEN.*
THE SEVEN SONS AND THREE DAUGHTERS OF JOB. AND THAT'S ONLY AFTER MAKING A BET WITH GOD. LOOK IT UP.
KINDA RAISES A BIG QUESTION, DON'T IT, WARDEN?
BETWEEN HEAVEN AND HELL...
WHICH ONE SHOULD WE *REALLY* BE AFRAID OF?

IT'S QUESTIONS LIKE THIS THAT'VE BROUGHT ME HERE.
I'M A MAN IN NEED OF SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE. AND I THINK ONE OF YOUR PRISONERS CAN HELP ME WITH THAT.

YOU KNOW WHAT I THINK?
ABOUT THE BIBLE?
ABOUT *YOU*.
I THINK ANY MAN CRAZY ENOUGH TO BREAK *INTO* MY PRISON OUGHT TO BE WELCOME TO *STAY* HERE A SPELL.

DRAG MOSS OUTTA THERE AND THEN LOCK IT UP. WE'LL LET THIS NUTJOB *STEW* FOR A BIT.

I SUPPOSE AT THIS POINT IT WOULD BE POINTLESS FOR ME TO SAY SOMETHING LIKE... *"YOU'RE MAKING A BIG MISTAKE."*

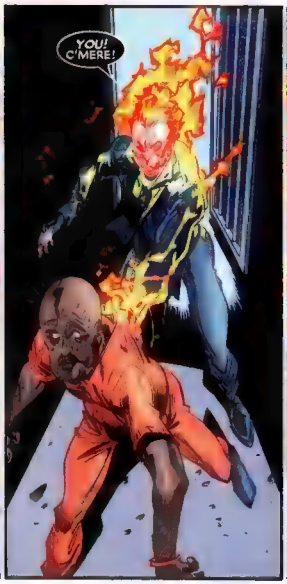
GOODBYE, MR. BLAZE.

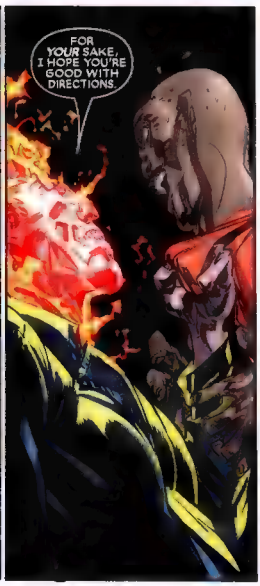
LOCKER ROOM
A
HEY, BOB. HOW'S IT GOING?
THEY SCHEDULE YOU IN *HERE* TODAY?
BOB?
WANT A DONUT?
KRAKOOM

BOB! WHAT THE HELL!
WAIT, DON--
AARRGHH!
HSSSSSSS
WHACK
THIS OUGHT TO DO JUST NICELY.
TIER ONE
TIER TWO
TIER THREE
YES, YOU'RE RIGHT, LORD ZADKIEL... YOU'RE RIGHT...

THUNG
TIME NOW TO MAKE THEM *ALL* SUFFER. I HEAR THE VOICE INSIDE MY HEAD SCREAM. TIME TO LET *VENGEANCE* RUN ITS COURSE.
AND IT WOULD BE SO *EASY* TO DO THAT. SO EASY TO JUST GIVE IN AND LET IT BURN EVERYTHING AROUND ME TO THE GROUND.
SO EASY TO SIMPLY BE THE *GHOST RIDER* AND NOTHING ELSE.
BUT TO DO THAT WOULD KILL WHATEVER'S LEFT OF JOHNNY BLAZE. SO I BITE MY LIP AND CLOSE MY EYES AND JUST HOPE BEYOND HOPE THAT I CAN GET WHAT I WANT AND GET OUTTA HERE..
BEFORE EVERYTHING GOES ALL TO HELL.

SO MUCH FOR THAT PLAN.


YOU! C'MERE!


FOR YOUR SAKE, I HOPE YOU'RE GOOD WITH DIRECTIONS.

BUT THESE DAYS YOU PEOPLE ARE THE *LEAST* OF MY WORRIES.
KNIGHT IN SATAN

YOU MAY HAVE BEATEN OUR MASTER, LITTLE WHORE OF HEAVEN, BUT REST ASSURED, HELL *WILL* RISE AGAIN.
AND ON THAT DAY, YOU WILL BE NOTHING BUT A FLECK OF EXCREMENT ON THE BOOT HEEL OF THE GREAT RED DRAGON. *HAIL, SATAN!*

YEAH, SURE, WHATEVER. LOOK THOUGH, I DIDN'T COME HERE FOR THIS. I CAME TO SEE THE ONE YOU'RE GUARDING.

WHOEVER PUTS A *KNIFE* IN HIM WILL EARN THEMSELVES A BEVY OF HELLSPAWNED HARLOTS.
CUT OUT HIS EYES AND YOU'LL WAKE UP TOMORROW A PRINCE OF THE UNDERWORLD.

HOLD IT!

HE SAID HE'S NOT HERE FOR YOU FELLAS. HE'S HERE TO SEE [redacted]. AND I CAN TELL WHY.
THE ANGELS HAVE HAD THEIR HANDS ON YOU, HAVEN'T THEY, BOY?
LET ME GUESS...THEY RUINED YOUR LIFE. TOOK AWAY EVERYTHING YOU ONCE HELD DEAR. MADE YOU DO THINGS YOU NEVER THOUGHT YOURSELF CAPABLE OF DOING.
SOMETHING LIKE THAT?
EXACTLY LIKE THAT
AH. WELL THEN. IN THAT CASE...
WELCOME TO MY WORLD.
AND LET ME JUST SAY, THAT IF YOU'RE HERE BECAUSE YOU'RE SEEKING VENGEANCE AGAINST ZADKIEL AND YOU THINK I CAN HELP YOU, THAT YOU'RE AN ABSOLUTE AND UTTER FOOL WHO HAS NO IDEA WHAT HE'S GOTTEN HIMSELF INTO.
AND THAT BY EVEN COMING HERE TODAY, YOU'VE LIKELY DOOMED US ALL TO A HORRIFYING DEATH.
SO... ANY QUESTIONS?

SOLITARY CONFINEMENT
CELL - 17
DO NOT OPEN UNDER
ANY CIRCUMSTANCES
I GOT A QUESTION, PETE...
WHY ARE WE HERE GUARDING THIS ONE CELL WHEN THE WHOLE FREAKIN' PRISON IS OUTTA CONTROL?
A RIOT'S ONE THING, KID. BUT WE LET THE MAN IN THIS CELL GET OUT... WE GOT A WHOLE OTHER SITUATION ON OUR HANDS.
WHY? WHO IS HE? WHAT'D HE D--
STOP RIGHT THERE OR GET A GUTFUL A' LEAD!
DON'T SHOOT, PETE! IT'S ME, BOB!
BOB, THANK GOD. WHAT THE HELL'S THE SITUATION OUT THERE?
THIS IS IT, RIGHT? THIS IS WHERE THEY KEEP THE DEACON?
WELL, YEAH...

BOB?
I'M SORRY, PETE.
YOU SHOULD'VE COME TO CHURCH WITH ME WHEN I INVITED YOU.
K-POW POW
K-CHINK
YOU CAN COME OUT NOW, MR. DEACON.
OUR LORD CALLS YOU ONCE MORE INTO SERVICE.

"AND LO, THE ANGEL OF THE LORD BY NIGHT DID THROW WIDE THE DOORS OF THE COMMON PRISON AND BRING FORTH THE SERVANTS OF THE LORD, SAYING...
"I CHARGE THEE THEREFORE BEFORE HEAVEN, WHO SHALL JUDGE THE QUICK AND THE DEAD, AND THE FORNICATORS AND IDOLATERS, THE DEVIANTS AND THE DEVILS...
"I CHARGE THEE TO PREACH THE WORD.
"BE INSTANT IN SEASON AND OUT OF SEASON. EXHORT WITH ALL LONG SUFFERING. REPROVE. REBUKE. AMEN."
WHO ARE YOU?
BOB.
ARE YOU A DISCIPLE OF THE NEW DAWN, BOB? ARE YOU A SERVANT OF THE HEAVENLY HOST?
I AM.
GOOD. THEN HAND ME THAT MOSSBERG, BROTHER BOB...

GOD DON'T LIVE ON CELL BLOCK D

PART ONE

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GHOST WRITERS

GHOST WRITERS:
Welcome back, Flamehead fans. First order of business, we have some comings and goings this issue. We just recently bid farewell to editor Aubrey Sitterson, who's moving on to the world of professional wrestling (no really), though as a writer, not a luchador, and we wish him all the best. Taking over the editorial reins is Daniel Ketchum, so let's all give him a big Flamehead welcome. Wanna say hi, Daniel?

I'm happy to be on board, Jason! Especially so because I have finally achieved a lifelong dream: I am DANIEL KETCHUM and I am editing DANNY KETCH. My life is now complete. The ribbing I take at the weekly Marvel staff meetings has totally been worth it.

And let's also give a warm welcome to artist Tan Eng Huat, whose gorgeous pencils previously graced the pages of books like SILVER SURFER: IN THY NAME and Doom Patrol. Tan is doing some simply amazing work on GHOST RIDER, and I can't wait for you readers to see what's coming down the pike.

Now one last order of business, and that's our soundtrack contest. I was really overwhelmed by the amount of mail we got after announcing the contest. Thanks to everybody who wrote in. It was really tough to pick a winner, but here we go.

Honorable mentions goes to Christopher Miya, who sent in a list of 20 songs, including Springsteen, Robert Johnson, Bo Diddley and Albert King, and to Elizabeth Vounce, who compiled a list of 31 great songs. Also, kudos to Ethan Slayton for including "Devil Went Down to Georgia" by Charlie Daniels, Trevor Smart of Romford Essex, U.K., for choosing "Straight to Hell" by The Clash and John J. Pellerito III for adding in some Fog Hat. Nice ones, fellas. But unfortunately there can be but one winner, and that honor goes to John Van Atta, whose list I thought showed a great deal of diversity.

1. "Crossroads" – Robert Johnson
2. "Ace of Spades" – Motorhead
3. "A New Level" – Pantera
4. "25 Minutes to Go" (live at Folsom Prison) – Johnny Cash
5. "The Mercy Seat" – Nick Cave
6. "Dirt in the Ground" – Tom Waits
7. "Gladiator" – The Jesus Lizard
8. "Come Back" – Misfits
9. "Search and Destroy" – Iggy and the Stooges (If anybody's got a heart full of napalm, it's Johnny Blaze)
10. "State Trooper" – Bruce Springsteen

Congrats, John. As winner you'll be getting signed copies of the "Hell Bent and Heaven Bound" arc. And thanks again to everybody who sent in a soundtrack. I loved reading through them, and some of you even turned me on to some new music. Now here is a special soundtrack prepared by outgoing editor Aubrey Sitterson:

1. "Straight to Hell" by Hank Williams III
2. "La Grange" by ZZ Top
3. "You Think I ain't Worth a Dollar but I Feel like a Millionaire" by Queens of the Stone Age
4. "Pagan Baby" by Creedence Clearwater Revival
5. "T.N.T." by AC/DC
6. "Where Eagles Dare" by The Misfits
7. "Search and Destroy" by Iggy Pop
8. "Speaking in Tongues" by the Eagles of Death Metal
9. "No Remorse (I Wanna Die)" by Slayer & Atari Teenage Riot
10. "Mean Heart" by Jon Spencer Blues Explosion

And last but not least, here's mine:

1. "Straight to Hell" – Hank Williams III
2. "Highway to Hell" – AC/DC
3. "Whiskey Bent and Hell Bound" – Hank Williams, Jr.
4. "Ride to Live, Live to Ride" – Twisted Sister
5. "Jesus Built My Hot Rod" – Ministry
6. "Misery Machine" – Marilyn Manson
7. "Ghost Riders In the Sky" – Me First and the Gimme Gimmes
8. "Satan's Gotta Get Along Without Me" – Buck Owens
9. "Where's the Devil When You Need Him" – Th' Legendary Shack Shakers
10. "God's Gonna Cut You Down" – Johnny Cash

Since so many of you seemed to dig that contest, how about we do another one? I want you to cast your own GHOST RIDER movie. Tell me who should play the parts of Johnny, Danny Ketch, Satan, Roxanne, the cannibal Wojciehowicz and the Head Nurse in the ultimate GHOST RIDER grindhouse flick. Winner gets signed comics and maybe a surprise or two. Now on to your letters.

Hi. My name is Nicky Affatato. I am almost 6 years old. I like comics. Recently I saw the Ghost Rider movie and became a fan. After that I asked my Daddy to pick up Ghost Rider comics for me. He reads them to me before I go to bed (omitting the adult words, of course), and Ghost Rider is now my favorite comic. I can't wait until your next issue comes out. Keep up the good work.

Your youngest fan,
Nicky

It always does my heart good to see kids reading comics, so thanks so much for the letter, Nicky. And tell your dad I'm sorry about all the adult words.

Dear Mr. Aaron,

I'm addressing this letter to you personally because I just want to say: thank you. Thank you for returning Ghost Rider to his badass ways. Thank you for giving us back a hard-edged Johnny Blaze. Thank you for writing dialogue that makes me go "WHOA". But most important of all: thank you for bringing back Dan Ketch. You have released all sorts of nostalgic feelings for me, taken me back to the days when I first got into comics, and taken me back to the moments that made me love Ghost Rider in the first place. You truly are a great writer.

Sammy Allouba,
Toronto, ON

Thanks, Sammy. Danny obviously doesn't pop up in this issue, but look for him again in issue #26, when things start to really heat up. Poor old Blaze doesn't know what he's in for.

Heyya Ghost Writers!!!

I am Raphael Borg, a Siculo-Maltese student from Malta and I'm a HUGE fan of Ol' Flamehead, especially the real deal (i.e. Johnny Blaze) not that Dan Ketch isn't cool mind you, with the penance stare and stuff, but nothing beats Blaze!! At school they even nicknamed me 'Rider' cos of my love of the character. I've been collecting Ghost Rider comics (along with other titles) for four years approximately. I just looooooooooooove the stories, particularly the ones by the Way/Texeira/Saltares and Ennis/Crain creative teams. I'm liking this latest arc too. Love the new look. More savage...more 'no-more-mister-nice-ghostie'. And the twist in the fact that Ol' Matchstickhead is an angel? AWESOME!!! (between us I suspected all along). Keep it up!!

A couple of questions: 1.) Any plans to bring back Vengeance (i.e. Mike Badilino)? 2.) Will Ghostie have a 'Secret Invasion' title or some sort of involvement? 3.) Any plans for Crain to return for the interior art at least for a couple of issues? 4.) Will you make a one-shot detailing the TRUE origins of Ghostie in detail after the series ends?

Keep it up, guys! And until Blackheart and Johnny get married in a frozen night in hell...MAKE MINE A FLAMING MARVEL!!!!

Raphael Borg
a.k.a Rider :D

Thanks, Raphael. In answer to your questions: 1) No, sorry, there are no plans at present for Vengeance. 2) We initially talked about doing a Secret Invasion tie-in, but ultimately decided against it. After all, Flamehead has plenty of his own problems to deal with as it is. 3) I don't think there are any plans for Clayton Crain to return to GHOST RIDER, but you can still check out his work every month in the pages of X-FORCE. 4) We most certainly will be learning more about the origins of the Spirit of Vengeance as things move forward, so just stay tuned.

That's all for this month, True Believers. Come back next issue as Blaze goes toe to toe with The Deacon in a fight you won't soon forget. Happy trails.

Jason Aaron
May 2008

TOE TO TOE WITH THE DEACON

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